Westward by Steven Wright

The date is May 9, 1844. As father loads up the wagon, my younger brother and I play with the oxen that pull it. My brother Timothy is three years old. My mother helps pack too, filling the cart with rice, corn, and other foods that we’ll snack on during our trip west. I myself am thirteen. I’m actually a little scared about our journey to the Oregon Territory. Earlier travelers report being attacked by Indians on the trail, and a disease called the “camp fever” struck many of them. Most were buried along the road.

May 11, 1844. We finally set off on our long movement westward. A group of fifty other wagons (a small count for migration groups) invited us to join them. The leader’s name was George Johnson, a farmer like my father. They both had the Manifest Destiny and agreed to the fight for all of Oregon. Our journey started from Tennessee and into Missouri. The people there greeted us politely and wished us luck. Some even came along. By the time we reached the actual trail, the wagon count had reached sixty-five. Timothy continues to cry, even in his mother’s arms. I think it’s because he’s homesick. I always say to him, “Don’t worry Tim, we’ll be at our new home soon.”

June 5, 1844. It’s beginning to get boring for me. There’s nothing to do except walk next to the oxen. I even got dizzy sitting in the wagon a couple times. I like to drive sometimes when my father needs a rest. He’s needed more and more rests lately and constantly talking to my mother. She won’t tell me what they’re saying, but it could be because father could be sick. When I asked that to mother, she stared at me, and yelled,”How could you think of such a thing!” I knew it was true, though.

June 27. It happened. Just like in my nightmares, Indians ran at my family with hatchets. The savages ambushed our caravan, slaughtering a few of us since this is their rightful land. However, we fought back. My father grabbed two muskets and tossed one to me. “If he has feathers on his head, shoot him!” he ordered. I never really killed one, just injured him. There was a tall one retreating with the others. I managed to give him a leaded blow to the shin. He screamed, and then stumbled into the woods. I turned to my father, who was being tended by Johnson due to an ax wound in the upper right arm. My face darkened to see my Pa shed tears. In the end we were told that twenty out of the two-hundred Americans were killed (and some others wounded) by the raid. Funerals were held by the side of the trail like I’d read about.

September 4. Boy, it was boiling out here! Were starting into winter, and I can already see the snow on top of the peaks of the Rockies. Father has recovered from his scars, but he is still sick. George Johnson says it is indeed the camp fever and tries all he can to help my Pa out. As he worsens, I begin to hope for the worse.

September 9. We buried him under a large oak in a grassy field. On the tree I wrote his initials. My mother seemed to cry the most. Johnson declared that we must continue west, father or no father. I really enjoy being with him now. He’s like a stepfather, only my mom says she’ll never marry again. We gather firewood and he lets me sit beside him as he steers our wagon.

November 3, 1844. I couldn’t wait to get off the wagon. We made it to the Oregon Territory. I offered to let George to stay with us, but he plans to be a fur trader, meaning he’ll be travelling all the time. It was difficult to see him go, but my mother and Tim need me to be the man of our new house. It’s a two-story log cabin with its own lake. There’s tons of bass in it, and Timothy and I like to go fishing. I can’t believe that now four year old brother of mine caught a bigger bass than I did! This place is much better than Tennessee, with slaves being whipped all day. We never owned any, and it’s looking like there will be a war about it soon.

Resources:

* healthline.com: <http://www.healthline.com/galecontent/typhus-epidemic>
* pbs.org: <http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/program/episodes/two/westwardfree.htm>
* google.com: <http://www.google.com/search?sourceid=navclient&aq=0&oq=rockie+mountains+map&ie=UTF-8&rlz=1T4GGLL_enUS336US336&q=rockie+mountains+map>

And

<http://maps.google.com/maps?f=s&utm_campaign=en&utm_source=en-ha-na-us-bk-gm&utm_medium=ha&utm_term=google%20maps>

* ancestry.com: <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~wallner/_borders/Oregon%20Trail.gif>
* Textbook
* Microbiology: Fifth edition by Wistreich and Lechtman